

THE GLOBAL CRISIS OF VIOLENCE

COMMON PROBLEMS, UNIVERSAL CAUSES, SHARED SOLUTIONS

Violence Against Women and Children: Beyond a Family Affair



One in a series of six
briefing papers produced
by the Violence and
Development Project.

*The Violence and Development Project is a collaboration between
the National Association of Social Workers, the Council on Social Work Education,
the Benton Foundation and the U.S. Agency for International Development.*

OFFICE OF PEACE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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Violence Against Women and Children: Beyond a Family Affair

Violence within the context of the family is a social problem with which the social work profession has been deeply concerned. However, violence against women and children does not occur in the isolation of the home. Rather, it is deeply embedded in a global ideology of male superiority that makes women and children particularly vulnerable to violence in all domains.

Violence against women worldwide is pervasive and serious, yet the problem was denied for a long time. The World-watch Institute states, "Violence against wives, indeed violence against (females) in general, is as old as recorded history, and cuts across all societies and socioeconomic groups. There are few phenomena so pervasive and yet so ignored."¹

The issue of violence within the family was first raised as a serious concern in 1975 at the Mexico City World Conference of the International Women's Year. However, it was not until the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in Copenhagen that the need to eliminate all forms of violence against women was fully recognized.²

Gender violence became a prominent issue at the 1985 World Conference on Women in Nairobi.³ For the first time, women came together as activists for change within the international community. Violence against women has thus "emerged as a serious issue and the subject of worldwide debate. The problem has been recognized as a serious obstacle to development and peace."⁴

"It is time for us to say here in Beijing, and for the world to hear, that it is no longer acceptable to discuss women's rights as separate from human rights."

—Hillary Rodham Clinton at the Fourth World Conference on Women

The rights of children also received international recognition with the passage of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the United Nations General Assembly in November 1989. The Convention calls on nations to protect children from all forms of violence and exploitation.⁵

In this paper, we will look at the pervasiveness of violence against women and children. We will examine how violence obstructs the healthy development of individuals and societies, and how lack of development opportunities fuels violence. And we will explore what has been done, and what needs to be done, to prevent violence against women.

Gender Violence: A Global Problem

Much of the violence that is directed towards women is rooted in economic, political, cultural, and religious systems that ensure male domination and control. Because violence against women is normalized to such a large extent, it is not considered unusual behavior when women are murdered, assaulted, sexually abused, threatened or humiliated by their

male partners.⁶ Traditions and social systems legitimize gender discrimination beginning at birth.⁷

Although the various dimensions of violence against women have not been sufficiently documented throughout the world, the following statistics shed light on its pervasiveness:

- In the US, battery is the leading cause of injury to adult women.⁸
- Domestic violence is estimated to occur in at least 70 percent of Mexican families.⁹
- In Pakistan, reports show that a woman is burned alive by her husband at least once a day, and there are many more cases that go unreported.¹⁰
- There are 100 million fewer females in Asia than would have been produced by normal birth-rates due to female infanticide, selective feeding of infants, and selective abortion practices.¹¹
- The United Nations estimates that two out of three of the world's unschooled, and thus illiterate, people are female.¹²

The widespread cultural belief that women are inferior gives rise to inequity, which in itself is a form of violence. When comparing boys with girls in the global South, girls are more likely to be: given less food; denied access to education and health care; forced into hard labor sooner; denied any kind of economic return on their labor; made to marry as very young teens; bought and sold like slaves for prostitution and la-

The Violence and Development Project

The Violence and Development Project, a collaboration between the National Association of Social Workers, the Council on Social Work Education, and the Benton Foundation, aims to educate social work professionals about the parallel conditions of violence in the U.S. and less economically developed countries. To this end, the project, with the help of funding from the United States Agency for International Development has prepared a series of six papers focusing on violence as a global affliction and sustainable human development as a global antidote.

In this series, we will address the following questions:

- What is the interrelationship between violence and related problems in the U.S. and less developed nations?
- What do social workers know about these problems, and what is the role of social workers in solving the global problem of violence?
- What can we learn from past and current international development efforts of the U.S. government and non-governmental development agencies?

This paper provides an overview of the connections between violence and development. The remaining papers in this series will focus on violence in relationship to five sub-themes: substance abuse, women and children, ethnicity, poverty, and trauma.

Key Concepts

Sustainable Human Development

The term development may be defined as "meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life." According to this broad definition, development focuses on fostering economic opportunity, equity, human rights, dignity, democracy, peace, and spiritual and emotional well-being.¹

Social workers will readily understand this concept, for it is what they strive to do everyday in their work with individuals, families, communities and organizations. In this series, however, we will be examining development from a national and international perspective.

Beginning in the late 1980s, a new consensus emerged within the international development community about how to best achieve long-lasting, positive change within poor countries. The agreed-upon strategy, known as sustainable human development, is based on these underlying principles:

- Meeting basic human needs for food, clean water, shelter, health care and education.
- Expanding economic opportunities for people, especially the poor, to increase their productivity and earning capacity in ways that are environmentally, economically and socially viable over the long-term.
- Protecting the environment by managing natural resources in ways that take into account the needs of current and future generations.
- Promoting democratic participation, especially by poor women and men, in economic and political decisions that affect their lives.
- Encouraging adherence to internationally recognized human rights standards.²

The International Development Community

The United States, through the federal office called the Agency for International Development, spent slightly less than one percent of the annual national budget, or \$14 billion, on foreign assistance in 1994. Of this money, 15 percent, or \$2.1 billion, went to fund projects to help people in poor countries better their lives. Other monies went toward military and security aid; food, exports, and other economic aid; and emergency humanitarian assistance.³

In addition to federal funds, there are several hundred U.S.-based charitable international development organizations, called private voluntary organizations (PVOs) or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These organizations receive an estimated \$4.5 billion a year from individuals and businesses that goes to support relief and development efforts in the poorest nations of the world. Some of the better known of these organizations are Save the Children, CARE, Oxfam and the American Red Cross.⁴

Global North/Global South

The term global North refers to the world's industrialized, wealthy countries, while the term global South refers to the world's poor nations. These terms are merely descriptive, as the split between rich and poor nations does not fall along strict geographic lines.

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According to per capita gross national product figures from the World Bank, there are 24 high-income countries, with 15% of the world's people, including the United States, Switzerland and Japan. Sixty-three countries, containing 29% of the population make up the middle-income category, which includes the Philippines, Romania, and Iran. The low-income sector, with a total of 45 countries and 56% of the world's population, includes Guatemala, Somalia, and Bangladesh.⁵

Violence

Violence may be broadly defined as an act or situation that harms the health and/or well being of oneself or others. Violence includes both direct attacks on a person's physical and psychological integrity, and destructive acts that do not involve a direct relationship between victims and the institution or person responsible for the harm.⁶

One of the goals of this project is to expand the common perception of violence to include such problems as racism, sexism, poverty, and hunger. These social ills grow out of institutions, governments, and economic structures that encourage the domination of certain groups of people over other groups, perpetuating unequal access to wealth and other resources. Inequities, which may be based on class, race, gender, or ethnicity, are often enforced through the use of violence by police forces, government troops or their proxies, foreign powers, and other forms of sanctioned militarism.

Threats to personal security and social stability come

from several sources. Among them: social and economic systems (deprivation, lack of access, oppression); the state (repression, torture, police brutality or inaction); other states (colonization, war); other groups of people (civil war, ethnic conflict, discrimination, hate crimes); and individuals or gangs (homicide, muggings). Violence may be directed against specific groups such as women (rape, domestic violence, lack of access to better education or jobs); children (child abuse, neglect); and ethnic populations (genocide, hate crimes, discrimination), or against the self (suicide, substance abuse).

Among the underlying principles of the Violence and Development Project is that long-term solutions to violence must include permanent changes in structural and institutional systems that give rise to deprivation and oppression and create a world of haves and have-nots.

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*The following chart lays out three tiers of violence.
These tiers form an intractable cycle, each feeding upon the other.*

Structural

Avoidable deprivations built into the structure of society based on norms and traditions that subjugate one group in favor of another (poverty, hunger)

Institutional

Harmful acts by organizations and institutions (oppression, unequal treatment under the law, police brutality, torture)

Official forms of violence (state repression, war and invasion)

Personal

Interpersonal acts of violence against persons or property (rape, murder, muggings)

Harmful acts against self (alcohol, drug abuse, suicide)

Acts by organized groups or mobs (hate crimes, looting, rioting)⁷

bor; and killed by sex-selective abortions and female infanticide.¹³

Women also suffer from additional forms of violence which are officially sanctioned:

- Many of the world's political prisoners are women activists from around the globe who have spoken out against gender-based violence.
- More women than men die as a result of armed conflicts.
- The majority of women do not enjoy basic human and civil rights in many countries. While some countries have laws against gender inequity, they often are not enforced.¹⁴
- Women still earn 30 percent to 40 percent less than their male counterparts for comparable work.¹⁵

Violence Against Children

Like women, children are victims of many forms of violence, both inside and outside the home.

According to Childhelp USA, one in three girls and one in eight boys are sexually abused in the U.S. before the age of 18.¹⁶ The majority of child sexual abuse in the U.S. is perpetrated by someone known to the child—very often the father, stepfather, or father substitute. While there is limited information about family sexual abuse in the global South, studies done in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand suggest that the extent of the problem is similar to that of the U.S.¹⁷

Another form of child abuse that has gained notoriety in recent years is the selling of children for sex to adult tourists and other international visitors in countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Children are also involved in prostitution in disturbingly large numbers in Western Europe and North America, and there are reports of a growth in child sexual exploitation in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. The perpetrators are almost always male, while the children who are exploited are both male and female—

although girls constitute by far the greatest proportion of the victims.¹⁸

The following quote illustrates the magnitude of violence against children worldwide:

"The stories pour forth in an avalanche of horror. From Bosnia, young girls raped . . . and murdered. From Angola, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Mozambique, children literally torn to shreds by land-mines . . . From Brazil, a paramilitary massacre of street children while they sleep in the quiet shadows of a church. From Thailand, young girls, stolen from their Myanmar villages, to be locked in brothels, servicing male sexual predators. From Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, child refugees on the run . . . fleeing civil war, cut down in their flight by mortars, bullets, machetes."¹⁹ —*United Nations*

Obstacles to Development

Male domination. Some scholars suggest that faith in violence as a solution to problems, and militaristic values at the structural level result in boys being programmed to assume roles of dominance and male supremacy. There would appear to be a connection between this culturally programmed desire for dominance and the fact that so many men around the globe turn to violence against women.²⁰ Other scholars suggest that the low economic position of women (and children) is linked with their vulnerability to violence, particularly within their households. This theory stresses that the subordination of women within society allows them to become victims of violence. "Violence against women is a function of the belief, fostered in all cultures, that men are superior and that the women they live with are their possessions or chattels that they can treat as they wish and as they consider appropriate."²¹

Militarism.

"Left to sustain the family and endure the loneliness and vulnerability of separation, women suffer

great hardships in wartime. Their houses may be damaged, or they may flee from home for fear of their lives. Dwindling food supplies and hungry children exacerbate tensions. And so, to the loss of husbands, fathers, sons and brothers who are killed in battle, is added the suffering of further deprivation. Often defenseless against invasion, women can find that armed conflict means rape and other forms of abuse by occupying troops, as well as a loss of the means of livelihood."²² —*United Nations*

Women are affected by war in a multitude of ways:

- In 1992, more people were killed in wars than at any time throughout the Cold War. Women and children were the primary victims of those wars.²³
- Women are extremely vulnerable to rape, torture, and exploitation during military conflicts. There is growing international recognition of rape being used as a tactic or prize of war.²⁴
- Thirty to forty percent of people killed by anti-personnel mines are women and children.²⁵
- Eighty percent of the world's refugees are women and their dependent children.²⁶
- Approximately 200,000 children have been recruited to be soldiers during the last decade. These children have been: separated from their families, denied a normal life, subjected to military training that has distorted their values, and traumatized by war experiences.²⁷

In addition, unprecedented military spending in both the global North and the global South over the past three decades has slowed progress in the areas of health, education, and other basic needs in many parts of the world. This has adversely effected the health and status of women, and has made it difficult for poor women to get the services they need for their children.²⁸

Domestic violence. Domestic violence is a form of control that puts women's health—and lives—at risk, denies them their human rights, and hinders their full participation in society. For example, case studies of victims of domestic violence in Peru and Mexico revealed that men frequently beat their wives to demand the income these women had earned.²⁹ A project of the Working Women's Forum in Madras, India almost collapsed when the most articulate and energetic women started to drop out because of increasing domestic violence against them as a result of their involvement in the project.³⁰

Domestic violence also affects children's development. A Canadian study reported post-traumatic-stress disorder, clinical dysfunction, and behavioral and emotional disorders in children from violent homes.³¹

Unfortunately, the institutional response to family violence is often inadequate. Almost universally, the social impulse is to preserve the family at all costs, even if this compromises a woman's safety. As a high court judge in Uganda expressed, "It is better for one person to suffer rather than risk a complete breakdown of family life."³²

Changing political and economic systems. Political and economic changes effecting the poor frequently lead to a disruption of traditional ways of life, causing social norms and established means of providing for the community to unravel. Despite the fact that old systems have broken down, however, there often is no adequate alternative in place to support people's needs. These desperate circumstances create conditions of "every man for himself." Women and children often emerge as the most vulnerable.³³

One example of this problem is the worldwide trend toward urbanization of rural peoples after their traditional way of life has been disrupted by outside influences. This process of rapid urbanization and migration results in underemployment and underdevelopment, including lack of access to basic resources

and services. In such situations, a precarious economic existence is inevitable and in people's struggle to survive, violence is often a result.³⁴

Lack of development opportunities. Underdevelopment juxtaposed with a fiercely materialistic culture is seen by some as feeding violence in the U.S. It has been suggested that increasing violence is the result of "the sullen rage of mostly boys and young men who live in poverty and are taunted by visions of affluence and ease which they have no hope of reaching."³⁵

Inadequate development also seems to be a primary cause of violence in the lives of children in the global South. For example, nearly all of Latin America's street children, 10 percent to 30 percent of whom are female, are engaged in some form of economic activity on the streets to support themselves and/or to supplement their family income. Many report feeling proud to bring their earnings home to their families. Seventy-five percent of the girls on Latin America's streets are there to help meet their family's economic needs, with their parents' blessing.³⁶ However, living on the street makes children vulnerable to prostitution, drug abuse, violence and death. On average, six street children in Columbia and four in Brazil are killed each day.³⁷

Sustainable Human Development: An Antidote to Violence Against Women and Their Children

Many of the development issues that affect woman and children are the same in both the U.S. and the global South: violence in the home, community, and society at large; war; lack of public money or the commitment to address social problems; low wages; and lack of access to economic opportunities.

In order to address these problems, two approaches have been suggested.

Gender-sensitive development. Development experts have come to realize that investing in women is the surest way to improve life for all, as women have

primary responsibility for the well-being of the family and the community.³⁸

Tisch and Wallace suggest that a gender analysis be integrated into the conception, design and implementation of all development projects. Such an analysis would take into account the impact of a project on women's and men's roles and responsibilities.³⁹

Development initiatives should involve women at every stage of planning and execution in order to ensure that their perspective and needs are fully accounted for.⁴⁰ Far too often, projects are designed without consulting women, sometimes increasing the amount of work they are required to do, rather than easing their burden. For example, when improved plowing techniques were introduced in Kenya, male farmers were able to double the number of acres they could plant. The project, however, also doubled the already taxing workload of women. Traditionally it was their job to weed the fields—by hand.⁴¹

Development that addresses violence against women.

"The development community has come to realize that problems such as high fertility, deforestation and hunger cannot be solved without women's full participation. Yet, women cannot lend their labor or creative ideas fully when they are burdened with the physical and psychological scars of violence."⁴²

—L. Heise

It is clear that attempts to integrate women into development are doomed to failure if they do not make central the issue of violence against women.⁴³ Development agencies can make an important contribution by documenting the obstacles that gender violence places in the development path and by identifying strategies for countering them. Carrillo (1992) makes the case that the development community should support projects that address gender violence as legitimate projects in themselves.

Some efforts made to date to counter violence against women:

- In Bombay, "ladies only" cars were set aside on mass transit to prevent women from being harassed by men as they traveled to work.
- In Tempoal, Mexico, staff at the United Nations Development Fund for Women project worked with husbands and community members to address the increased violence that emerged as a result of women's changing roles.⁴⁴
- In Cambodia, where efforts are underway to rebuild the nation after many years of war, a study has been conducted to assess the legal rights of Cambodian women and the prevalence of domestic violence.⁴⁵

Making formal recommendations.

The following recommendations, proposed in 1993 by the International Center for Research on Women, are designed to promote gender-sensitive development by:

1. Developing economic opportunities for in private enterprise, in agriculture, and all sectors of formal employment.
2. Closing the gender gap in literacy and education.
3. Increasing women's reproductive choices by providing accessible, high-quality health and family planning services.
4. Ensuring that development efforts balance long-term environmental sustainability and women's subsistence

and economic needs based on natural resources.

5. Ensuring that emergency and development assistance programs take into account women's roles, needs and human rights in times of conflict, famine, disease, and rapidly changing economic and political circumstances.⁴⁶

Annapurna Mahila Mandal:

A Triumph of Women's Strength

In India, thousands of men pour into Bombay from the surrounding countryside to work in the city's thriving textile mills. In the poor neighborhoods (known as the "busti") where the workers live, enterprising women have developed small catering businesses to feed them. Along with exhausting workloads, these women contend with chronic indebtedness, forced to buy grains and other provisions on credit—often at annual interest rates of over 100 percent.

To address some of these problems, 14 determined women founded a small organization in 1973 aptly named Annapurna Mahila Mandal, after the Hindu goddess of food. For almost 10 years, Annapurna operated entirely on volunteer labor and donated space and money. Then, in 1982, with help from international development agencies, the Annapurnas opened a multi-purpose facility with paid staff to support their expanding program: loan services, a

medical clinic, legal counseling, and vocational skills training.

Thousands of Annapurna members have since borrowed millions of rupees from a revolving loan fund which boasts an almost perfect repayment record. By providing women caterers with capital support, equipment, and training, Annapurna has liberated its members from exploitative moneylenders. Their catering businesses more secure, women have become free to tackle new challenges: campaigning against dowries, domestic violence, and other discriminatory laws and practices.

Annapurna has been so successful that it has expanded its operations to Vashi, on the outskirts of Bombay. In addition to catering food to nearby factories and offices, the Vashi center also provides a temporary home to women who are destitute, abused, or abandoned by their husbands.

One of Annapurna's most important contributions is instilling a sense of dignity in women. Annapurna founder Prema Purao tells the women: "Your work is important and worthy of pride." By changing the way women think about themselves, Annapurna is improving the lives of extended families and entire communities.⁴⁷

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What You Can Do

- Learn what women's groups are doing in countries of the South to stop violence and promote development.
- Advocate for increasing the numbers of women in leadership positions in the United Nations, international development organizations, and US development projects.
- Read about the outcomes from the Fourth U.N. World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in September 1995.
- Advocate for increased availability of child care and health insurance for workers, and for laws and regulations that prohibit gender discrimination.
- Remember that early attitudes about gender roles and gender violence are shaped in schools. Ensure that children are taught that violence against women is unacceptable and that sexual harassment and abuse in the schools will not be tolerated.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

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Refugee Women in Development, 810 First St. NE, Suite 300 Washington, D.C. 20002, 202/289-1104

Association for Women in Development, 1511 "K" St., NW, Suite 825, Washington, D.C. 20005, 202/628-0440.

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children International Rescue Committee, 122 East 42nd St. New York, NY 10016-1289, 212/551-3086

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